

USEFI

An Educational and Cultural Bridge

An Interview with JANE E. SCHUKOSKE
by LAURINDA KEYS LONG



An attorney, a law professor, an academic, a researcher, a writer, an activist, a senior Fulbright scholar, a lecturer and an administrator. They are all one person: Jane E. Schukoske, who since May 2000 has been executive director of the U.S. Educational Foundation in India (USEFI). Popularly known as the Fulbright Commission, USEFI was created by a 1950 treaty to promote mutual understanding between Indians and Americans through educational exchanges. Scholars, professional experts, teachers, lecturers and researchers—people like Professor Schukoske—travel between the two countries with guidance, advice, encouragement, information and funding arranged by USEFI.

Fellowships are primarily funded by U.S. government agencies as part of the worldwide Fulbright Program, and, to expand their availability, USEFI is always seeking educational institutions, businesses and organizations in India and the United States to help sponsor a visiting lecturer, student, researcher or seminar. USEFI also administers the U.S. State Department-funded Humphrey Fellowships, the Ford Foundation-funded International Fellowships Program and others, arranges conferences and workshops, and sponsors appearances

by Fulbright alumni who return to India to share their experiences and education. Members of the USEFI Board, five Indians and five Americans, volunteer their time to set policies for and advise the Foundation, approve its budget and participate on committees which recommend qualified applicants for fellowships in the United States.

From its newly renovated headquarters in New Delhi, and from offices in Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta, USEFI also conducts informational programs throughout India to provide up-to-date, accurate and unbiased guidance for students interested in pursuing higher education at one of the 3,600 accredited colleges and universities in the United States.


Professor Schukoske took a leave of absence from her work as an associate professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law in Maryland to become USEFI executive director six years ago. While based in Sri Lanka as a senior Fulbright scholar in 1995-96, she had often been invited to lecture at Indian law schools, where she enjoyed the academic debate and felt the country's "vibrancy and warmth." On a return visit, she heard about the USEFI vacancy. It was initially a two-year assignment, but she has stayed on, challenged and energized by her work, Professor Schukoske told SPAN:

Why is the USEFI program important to the United States? To India?

To both countries, USEFI is a valuable educational and cultural bridge. USEFI's mission—Indo-U.S. educational and cultural exchange in the arts, humanities and social sciences—is part of the people-to-people diplomacy valued by the United States to nurture understanding, friendships and professional relationships between Indians and Americans. For India, USEFI's fellowships cultivate appreciation of ancient and contemporary India in the United States and bring American lecturers into Indian classrooms. USEFI's educational advising services provide Indian students access to accurate information about U.S. higher education. USEFI also encourages American students to pursue "Study India" programs.

What are the criteria you use for choosing Fulbright fellows?

To begin with, we're looking for people who have a clear research proposal that is doable within the time frame allowed. Successful applicants explain why it's important to go to the United States to do the research and how it would be relevant to India. In all our Fulbright scholarships we're looking for people who would be good cultural ambassadors and willing and able to share their Fulbright experience and their learning in



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their disciplines when they come back to India.

Is there a certain kind of research project that has a better chance of earning a fellowship?

The current focus is on issues of contemporary relevance. That cuts across so many fields. So it's not that there is a magic discipline, but that somebody has a fresh, good idea that is really relevant to both India and the United States.

What kind of personality do the selection committees like to see?

Committees look for self-starters who would reach out to the communities in which they're studying or researching in the United States and people who are willing to, upon return to India, reach out beyond their own institutions. We often arrange speaking engagements for them to talk about their work in the United States and some people are invited to help at pre-departure orientation programs for the next batch of scholars.

Do they get any pay for this?

It's hardly worth mentioning, taxi fare, basically. Fulbright scholars are proud of their selection and experience, and are eager to give back to the community by sharing their learning.

What are the common misconceptions about Fulbright fellowships?

The Fulbright selection process is truly a transparent, merit-based process. Sometimes that's hard for people to believe. But our reputation for fairness is well established and I'm very pleased that I've experienced no interference.

What do you like most about your job?

It requires every wit I have! Many aspects of this job energize me: working with highly talented board members, scholars, students and staff; leading a team to creatively design workshops that feature the cross-cultural learning USEFI supports, and encouraging collaborative projects involving our scholars. And, on a day-to-day level, there is satisfaction in being able to place environmental economist Jim Stevens in Mizoram—the first American Fulbrighter there in memory. I enjoy seeing the enthusiasm of our Fulbright students working on issues critically important to India, such as Michelle Rosenthal's research on girls' education in rural Maharashtra and Ravi Satkalmi's research on Indian Americans' role in governance upon return to India.

What has been the most satisfying specific experience?

Seeing people collaborate across communities and cultures. Fulbrighters have banded together to do tsunami relief work, to publish journals featuring Indian and American writing, to plan environmental protection strategies and to further Indo-Pak dialogue. A group of Indian and Pakistani secondary school teachers of English have come back from their U.S. study to train the teachers in their school systems. Dance therapist Priti Patel leads troupes of adults and youngsters with special needs.

What is the Indian government connection with USEFI?

The Indian government appoints the five Indian Board members, people from academia, business and government. Board appointments are annual, according to our treaty, but often there are reappointments to provide continuity. The Indian government provides a refund of sales, excise and customs taxes that USEFI has paid. In addition, private Indian institu-

tions often provide in-kind contributions or cost-share our conferences.

Where does USEFI get funding?

Most of our funding is from the U.S. Department of State. We also receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education. We receive a grant from the U.S. International Fellowships Fund in New York funded by the Ford Foundation. We have a contract as the local representative for the East-West Center in Hawaii. Fulbright alumni donate, and students at universities pay for services received from our educational advising offices.

What are the fees for information about higher education in the United States?

USEFI's annual student membership cost is Rs. 1,500. There are certain other small fees for USEFI services. This fee level is much less than that charged by private agents to counsel scholars about education abroad. About 80 percent of the people desiring to study abroad go for graduate studies, so they become members when they are at university. We are seeing growing interest in undergraduate education in the United States so some secondary school students and secondary school guidance counselors come to us for advice.

Why is it important for U.S. universities and colleges to have Indian students?

Indian students who go to the United States are highly motivated and top performers. In addition to their academic abilities, they are valued in U.S. classrooms for the perspective they add to the class.

What are your aims?

As the higher education environment rapidly changes, there is a lot of opportunity for innovating, for seeing new ways to connect people and institutions and there are lots of interesting cross-cultural topics that our scholars are researching. It's great fun facilitating dialogue across cultures. That's what this job is about.

So, you're doing something worthwhile?

Yes. It's worthwhile in any era but it's particularly crucial in these times when there is so much misunderstanding cross-culturally.

What's most challenging?

The most challenging aspects of the job are staying up with the constantly evolving higher education environment. That's also extremely satisfying. We see lots of delegations from U.S. universities coming to India; some led by university presidents. They're interested in forging new relationships with Indian institutions. India is examining the issue of how it wants to regulate the entry of foreign edu-

cators. As we try to imagine innovative possibilities we also have to track the regulatory situation. So it's challenging to be creative and realistic at the same time.

Are you talking about joint degrees, on-line degrees, branches of American universities in India?

All those things. We have had people come to India who are setting up virtual classrooms between the United States

and India. We know U.S. institutions that would like to have a physical presence in India. We know of a lot of institutions that have twinning programs where Indian students take two years of study here and transfer to the United States for the final two years of study. Some of these arrangements are currently feasible. Others will take more guidance from India as to what it's interested in hosting. □

Possible Sources of Financial Aid

By MARTINA SCHULZE



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Princeton University's Jarrett Walters on graduation day.

the sciences than in social sciences and humanities. And there is generally more money for international students applying for academic than for professional programs. Incidentally, chances of receiving financial aid from the host institution increase during the second year of studies.

What kind of financial aid is available from U.S. sources?

International undergraduate students can apply for partial scholarships, primarily from private colleges and universities; they also are eligible for athletic scholarships and can apply for student loans. Graduate students can apply for teaching, research and administrative assistantships, as well as for fellowships and scholarships from private and public universities. Applying for a student loan is also an option.

How do you successfully apply for financial aid?

Start early with your preparations and research, preferably 15 to 18 months before your studies will begin. Learn about scholarships offered by your home government and university, and apply early.

Do your research: Visit an EducationUSA-supported advising center, and study the specialized reference works on U.S. colleges

and universities and prospective departments, which offer information on how much financial aid is available. Also, use the Internet to learn as much as possible about the four to six institutions that you are applying to. If you are a graduate student, run a Web search and get to know your professors before you apply. They are the people who will decide which new graduate assistants are accepted, and they should have heard from you before they review your application package.

Don't be shy about asking for financial aid. Send a second letter if your first application for financial aid has been denied, and address it to a specific person in the academic department or admissions office. If you don't succeed the first time, call to learn why your application was not successful and apply again with a stronger application the next year.

Financial aid for international students is limited and the competition is keen. To increase your chances of success, you should demonstrate that your academic qualifications are first-rate; study hard to get excellent TOEFL, SAT, GMAT or GRE scores; show that you have some private funds, or show your financial need; and send in a neat, complete and well-researched application. □

About the Author: Martina Schulze is an educational adviser at the American Center in Hamburg, Germany.

An expert outlines where international students, particularly graduate students, can look for financial aid, and how to make a successful application.

More than 500,000 international students successfully apply for admission to U.S. colleges and universities every year. According to the Institute of International Education, some 67 percent of them rely on family funds to pay for their studies in America. But for many, applying for adequate financial support is a crucial part of their application. On average, international students will have to pay between \$16,000 and \$46,500 for tuition and living expenses for an academic year in the United States.

Where do international students receive financial support?

The main sources for financial aid outside of personal funds are the host U.S. college or university, with 23 percent offering aid, followed by the home government or university with 2.4 percent. The overall picture changes, though, when one compares the percentages for undergraduate and graduate students: While only about 10 percent of all international undergraduates receive financial support from their host institution, 41 percent of all graduate students are supported by their host university. Many of them work as research and teaching assistants at doctoral and research institutions. Moreover, there are more funds available for PhD programs than for master's programs, as well as more funds in